

Sermon for December 27, 2020, “Blessing to end the year with gratitude”

SCRIPTURE: Daniel 6:1-10

¹ It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred twenty satraps, stationed throughout the whole kingdom, ² and over them three presidents, including Daniel; to these the satraps gave account, so that the king might suffer no loss. ³ Soon Daniel distinguished himself above all the other presidents and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him, and the king planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ So the presidents and the satraps tried to find grounds for complaint against Daniel in connection with the kingdom. But they could find no grounds for complaint or any corruption, because he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption could be found in him. ⁵ The men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.” ⁶ So the presidents and satraps conspired and came to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! ⁷ All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever prays to anyone, divine or human, for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into a den of lions. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict. ¹⁰ Although Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he continued to go to his house, which had windows in its upper room open toward Jerusalem, and to get down on his knees three times a day to pray to his God and praise him, just as he had done previously.

Introduction: Thanks given to us through Christ

Today is the last Sunday of 2020. In 2020, many people struggled with Covid-19. For that reason, many felt 2020 is a year we don't want to remember. However, if we cannot close 2020 with gratitude, it is unlikely we will end 2021 with gratitude. So it is a blessing to end the year with gratitude. Also, as Christians, we must not forget that Christian gratitude is not gratitude for circumstances or results, but gratitude for the Lord being with us.

In the past, when I was serving church in South Korea for a semester at a Christian college in Seoul, I taught a liberal arts class on “Christianity and the Bible.” At that time I asked students in class to write down what they were grateful for in their life.

One student thanked a friend who bought alcohol and food. A girl who had gastritis was grateful that her health was not worsening. Another girl was grateful for allowing her to study music. A student, over 60, was grateful for her well-bred child. Other than that, there were thanks to parents, boyfriends, girlfriends, and gratitude for not having to worry about tuition fees.

There were various thanks, and they are all valuable. But what was regrettable was most of the examples were seen through the eyes of what they experienced. As a result, I couldn't find thanks for what wasn't relevant to their situation and result. The gratitude the students cried for what they had gained and because they were in a good situation. If we are grateful for only the results, it will not be easy to be grateful in situations where we have not achieved desired results.

Dear Brothers and Sisters! Do you end the year with gratitude for 2020 when our daily lives were destroyed by Covid-19? Or are you hoping that this painful year will pass quickly?

The faith the Lord has taught us is not gratitude for circumstances and outcomes, but gratitude for what He is with us. So through of any difficulty, we can be grateful. And these thanks are not compulsory, but gratitude given to us by being with Christ. May everyone have the blessing of ending this year with a sincere confession of thanks.

First, let's look at the reasons why we should thank God through God's character in the Bible, and then let's look at Daniel's gratitude.

Body: Gratitude in the Bible

1. God's character

The Bible says that the reason we, as children of God, should be grateful to God is because of God's character. So what does the Bible say about God's character?

1) God is merciful.

“Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:26)

2) God is almighty.

“To him who divided the Red Sea asunder His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:13)

“Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:3)

3) God is the one who unites the saints.

“I thank God, who put into the heart of Titus the same concern I have for you.” (2 Corinthians 8:16)

4) God meets our needs.

“And who gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:25)

5) God is still in control of the world.

“The moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:9)

6) God protects us from our enemies.

“And freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:24)

7) God makes us victors.

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)

8) God leads us to eternity.

“With a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever.” (Psalm 136:12)

This is the character of God that the Bible speaks of. It's also a clear reason why we should thank God. What the Bible says about God's character is to convey to us that the object of our gratitude must be God, not circumstances and results. **“Thanks to God”** should be at the heart of our gratitude. So how should we express our gratitude to God? Daniel's gratitude in today's text shows this.

2) Daniel's thanks to God

Daniel became in Babylon's captivity in 605 B.C. at the young age of 16. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah and captured the people of Judah three times, and Daniel was taken during the first invasion. At that time, Babylonia captured many of Judah's young talents, such as Daniel. They infused into them the Babylonian language and religious culture, and used them to govern Judah more effectively in the future.

As the years passed, Nebuchadnezzar died and his son Belshazzar became king. And Darius of Persia became king after King Belshazzar of Babylonia. Today's text is from the days of King Darius. Daniel was over 80 at the time, and he was favored by King Darius.

Daniel was brought to foreign lands as a Jewish captive, but because of his excellence, he was favored by King Darius. This offended the pride of the Persians and aroused jealousy. So Daniel's enemies wanted to threaten Daniel, and they used Daniel's religious customs as seen in today's text to put Daniel in danger.

Daniel's enemies asked Darius to issue the king's decree to put Daniel in danger. The king Darius's decree was **'anyone who prays to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to king, shall be thrown into the lions' den.'** But in today's text, Daniel, who encountered the decree, did not care about the order and prayed to God according to the habit he did before. What's even more surprising is that Daniel prayed and thanked God three times a day as usual. The reason Daniel's actions surprise us is that Daniel's behavior does not spare his own life. In fact, Daniel's wealth and fame in Persia was beyond imagination. But Daniel was not afraid to give it up, and he was spared to sacrifice his own life. Daniel gave the best thanks he could ever give to the Lord.

By the way, Daniel does not show any fear of the dangerous situation he will encounter. Rather, we feel peace through his attitude. Daniel's bold actions can be compared to our complaining and inability to withstand changes in circumstances.

In fact, Daniel was able to do this because he had a clear belief and confidence in God's character. Therefore, those who have faith and confidence in God's character can boldly overcome difficulties even when they face them. Peter and John are examples of boldness in the face of difficulty; both were arrested and went out to the Council in Jerusalem after the Event of Pentecost; and Paul, who encountered a wind of typhoon called a northeaster while sailing to Rome.

If we have faith and confidence in God's character, this boldness in the face of difficulty will happen to us as well. Perhaps God would not challenge us with the feeling of the threat of life that he gave to Daniel, but what is clear is that God wants us to have the faith and confidence in God that Daniel wanted to keep to the end. So the starting point of our gratitude should not be the circumstances and results we are in, but our faith and confidence in God's character.

Conclusion: Preparing to say goodbye to 2020!

Now, let's summarize today's sermon. As we approach the end of 2020, we may be planning a party to celebrate New Year's Eve. Or maybe we wish to watch the sunrise on the morning of the New Year 2021. However, if we do not have faith and confidence in the Lord's character to meaningfully close 2020 all of these actions may cease to be satisfying. I bless you to close 2020 in a deep relationship with the Lord with gratitude and to welcome 2021 with hope. I wish you a Happy New Year, brothers and sisters.

Happy New Year

We lift in prayer those in hospitals, care centers, those who are home-bound, and for those who provide the care for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ who do not get out:

Edward Chesnut is at home at *Prairie Vista Retirement in Altoona*; **Ferne Michael** is at 9901 – 272nd Pl NW, Stanwood WA 98292 (phone: 203-300-6415); **Jim Hall** is at *Mill Pond in Ankeny*; **Jane Magers** is at *The Rose, 1330 – 19th St, Des Moines IA 50314*; **Virginia Crouse** is at *Valley View Village – Assisted Living Bldg. #3401 – 2571 Guthrie Ave, Des Moines IA 50317*.

We also lift in prayer those who remain both in self-imposed and mandate-imposed quarantine because of COVID 19.